

Keeping Sheep In...and Predators Out!

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There are many different types of fences to keep sheep in. The trick however, is to keep predators out! There is no fool proof way to keep predators, such as coyotes; out since they will keep trying (and testing) until they succeed in outsmarting the fence. Coyote proof fences are often very expensive and are not viable. Before selecting a fence, you should consider the following factors; look at how much lamb you market, your losses due to predation every year, the overall cost and life expectancy of the fence, and the amount of protection offered from the fence. A few different fencing options are listed below. In many cases producers may use a combination of fences depending on their individual farm operation.

Electric Fences

Electric fencing can be effective in controlling predators in certain situations. If you are thinking about electric fences for use as a perimeter fence, they must be at least 5 strands and in some situations 7-8 strands may be needed in order to keep predators out. The live and ground wires should alternate to make sure the intruder gets a good "zap". The spacing of the wires should also be correct; the bottom 3 wires should be no greater than 6 inches apart so that the coyote will be forced to touch both the ground and the live wire. The wires on the top can be spaced further than 6 inches apart to make the fence higher, which may discourage jumping.

Electric fences require fairly high maintenance since grass, trees, and fallen objects such as tree branches, can short out the fence. You may have to keep the vegetation clipped around the outside of the fence and test your fence regularly to determine if something is shorting it out.

Even with electric fences coyotes can still get through. Coyotes will either learn how to get through them or keep testing. If the power goes off, or the fence has shorted out, coyotes may take this opportunity to get through the fence and kill ewes or lambs.

Ground wires for your electric fence should all be connected to ensure that the predator will get an adequate shock. The more acreage, and ultimately length of fence that you want your sheep to be pastured on, the more ground rods you will require to guarantee that your electric fence is effective.

Net-Wire or Woven-Wire Fences

Net-wire fences can be a great option for boundary fences since they can be quite effective at discouraging predators. If the fence is higher than 5 feet the coyotes will not be able to jump the fence but may attempt to climb this type of fence, since they can adapt quickly to change. They may also attempt to dig under the net-wire fence. If a coyote does get into the pasture, often it is easy to determine the entry point. As soon as you find where the coyote got in, you can then fix the hole or gateway. Once the fence is installed, very little maintenance is required. The net-wire fence you purchase should have horizontal wires with spacing of 2 to 4 inches apart and vertical wires less than 6 inches apart at the bottom of the fence to prevent coyotes from going through the fence.

To extend the life of your net-wire fence, you should consider using 12.5 gauge high tensile electric wire with Class 3 galvanizing. This will help lessen the sag and stretch of the fence overtime. While high tensile net-wire fences may be more expensive they will outlast the conventional net-wire fences.

In order to make net-wire fences more effective you could add 1 or 2 strands of electric fence on top to stop coyotes from climbing the fence. Another option is to add 2 hot wires to the fence, one on the top and one offset wire on the outside of the fence to prevent coyotes from climbing and 'breaking in'.

Electric Net Fencing

Electric Net Fencing can be effective as temporary or semi-permanent fencing. You could use this type of fencing on rented land, on crop residues or to graze sheep on hay fields in the fall. It offers the best qualities from both electric fences and net-wire fences. This fence is a physical and mental barrier and can work quite well. Different styles of electric net fencing are available. All of these however, use horizontal electroplastic wires with vertical stays varying from rigid poly struts to electroplastic struts.

Electric Net Fencing can be quite expensive and has a relatively short life expectancy. It also is very labour intensive since it will need to be moved as the sheep graze down the pasture. During the winter, this fence should be taken down and stored inside to preserve the fence and give it a longer life expectancy. For a small flock this fence may be all that is required but for larger flocks this type of fence may be impractical due to the cost and the amount that would be needed to fence the flock. Remember to weigh the pros and cons before investing in this type of fencing.

Potential Fencing Options	
5 Strand Electric Fence	\$2.10 per foot installed
7 Strand Electric Fence	\$2.50 per foot installed
1047 Paige	\$2.95 per foot installed
1047 Paige with 2 hot wires, 1 on top and 1 offset	\$3.25 per foot installed
Electric Net Fencing	\$0.91 per foot
Good Electric Fencer	Approximately \$575 to \$1500

Prices as of July 2010. Courtesy of Brussels Agri Services Ltd. Prices are subject to change. These prices do not include corner posts or braces.

Cost of Three Different Fence Types				
Items for 40 Rods of Fence in a straight run (no corners) Note: 1 rod = 16.5 ft 40 rods is 660 ft or 201 Metres		High Tensile Sheep Fence	7- Wire Electric Fence	Electric Net Fence
1. Wire	2-20 rod rolls 1047-6-12.5 gauge HT woven wire fence at \$275 each	\$550.00		
	3 rolls 12.5 gauge, smooth, high tensile at \$85 per 2000 foot roll		\$255	
	4-165 ft. (50 m) rolls (35 in. high) at \$149 each			\$596.00
Brace wire	1 – 10 lb roll at \$18.95	\$18.95	\$18.95	
2. Posts	35 – 5 in. x 8 ft. posts at \$8.95 each (20 ft apart, plus part of brace assembly)	\$313.25		
	20 – 5 in. x 8 ft posts at \$8.95 each (approx. 33 ft (2 rods) apart, plus part of brace assembly)		\$179	
Brace Posts	4 – 6 in. x 8 ft posts at \$11.95 each	\$47.80	\$47.80	
3. Staples- Galvanized	11 lbs – 2 in. staples at \$2.25 per lb	\$24.75		
	6 lbs – 2 in. staples at \$2.25 per lb		\$15.04	
4. Insulators	4 bags of line post insulators at \$9.79 per		\$54.02	

	bag of 25 2 packages of end insulators at \$7.52 per bag of 4 (4 live wires with insulators, 3 wires with staples)			
5. Wire Tighteners and handle	7 inline tighteners at \$4.25 each & 1 tightener handle at \$19.99		49.74	
6. Ground Rods	3- ¾ in. 8 ft long galvanized steel rods (3/8 in.) at \$24.95 each		74.85	74.85
	Sub Total	\$954.75	\$693.04	\$670.85
	Life Expectancy (LE) –years	30 years	30 + years	5 years
	Cost Per Year (Subtotal / life expectancy)	\$31.83	\$23.11	\$134.17
7. Energizer	Assume Life expectancy of 15 years Various makes and models with various electrical outputs at \$575-\$1500 each		\$800.00 \$53.34/ yr	\$800.00 \$53.34/ yr

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Information Provided By: Anita O'Brien, Sheep and Goat Specialist, OMAFRA Factsheet.

Information on current pricing courtesy of Tim Prior of Brussels Agri Services Ltd. Their phone number is Toll Free at 1-877-887-9391 and their website is: <http://www.brusselsagri.com>